

## OPEN ACCESS – A DRIVER FOR DRAMATIC CHANGES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Lars Bjørnshauge

### The tipping point will come soon

Academic libraries, librarians and library associations have been and still are one of the driving forces in the Open (Access) movement.

During the latest years other (more important) stakeholders have entered the scene. Universities, university associations, research funders, research councils and their associations, governments and supranational organizations have now gone beyond signatures on various declarations and are implementing Open Access mandates and policies.

The recent developments in the UK, the expected developments in the European Commission and later in the member states will contribute and strengthen the process towards making open access the default in scholarly publishing and in a few years we could reach the tipping point where 50% of the annual output of research publications will be open access. The announcement last month from the SCOAP3 consortium in high energy physics revealed their agreements with publishers. The agreements will reduce the article processing charges (APCs) significantly and furthermore the deal will have the effect that the journals that won the tender will be taken away from the big deals and that revenue generated via hybrid open access will be recycled into reduced licensing fees (to avoid double dipping). This is the first real step in the decomposition of the big deals.

The momentum for open access will in the coming years change the game significantly. It may not happen tomorrow, but it will happen. How this will unfold is difficult to predict, but at some point it will or ought to have significant impact on the operations of academic libraries.

One of the driving forces here will be a much closer look at the costs of operating academic libraries and how individual libraries work and how they work or should work in common.

### Can/should libraries collaborate much more to be more efficient?

Academic libraries are already since many years struggling to make ends meet and to be able to renew

existing agreements with the traditional subscription based publishers. Libraries have for years been collaborating in consortia to keep price increases down, with some success, but in spite of their efforts prices increase above the inflation rates.

The transition to the provision of digital information through site licenses has made it possible to provide institutional users with access to enormous amounts of information, thus satisfying the continuous demand for access to databases, journal articles, e-books etc. But this development has also generated a lot of back office work (license negotiations, electronic resource management, openURL linking, authentication etc).

In reality, libraries are very much occupied with controlling access in order to secure, that so called non-authorized users cannot access the content, which is largely publicly funded research. Openness is a core value of librarians and libraries, but nevertheless libraries have to guarantee that non-affiliated users will be denied access.

In countries where national library consortia now have been in operation for a decade most of the universities and university colleges are subscribing to the content from all the major subscription publishers. Although there still are differences in the ability of universities to subscribe to all the big deals, it is fair to say that the institutions in the consortia to a large extent subscribes to the same content, have the same work to do in activating the content in their ERM-systems (electronic resource management) and link-resolvers. At the same time minor institutions, industry, knowledge intensive start-up companies, and ordinary citizens are suffering from lack of access to current research results, which harms innovation etc. Wider access to scholarly publications is in fact one of the most important drivers for the uptake of open access by research funders and decision makers.

Add to this the significant changes that have occurred with the advent of the big deals. In the good old days librarians carefully selected books and journals that (supposedly – but as we have seen far from always) were the most relevant and important for the user community.

Now libraries are buying discovery services with one million records, providing access to content licensed via big deals. No more nitty-gritty selection.

### **National licenses and centralized back office services?**

If libraries, universities and research funders are looking for ways to fund the transition costs associated with open access, why not look for changes that can at the same time reduce the overhead associated with library services and extend access to stakeholders outside the universities and research institutions.

The individual library should no longer operate as an isolated island. The concept of national licenses (instead of consortia licenses) -covering all users in a country - and centralized ERM- and linking services would reduce the workload on the academic libraries at the local level and give more users direct access to the content, with significant benefits to society at large.

That might in the short run mean slightly increased costs, price increases for the licenses with the publishers, but the reduction in the workload for the local libraries would probably outweigh that, and the benefits for society would be significant. Take in consideration here, that a rapidly increasing share of the annual production (and publishing) of research results would be in open access, which should lead to reductions in the deals with the publishers.

At the local level, the reduced costs to licenses and the work associated with that should then be reallocated into support for open access publishing, more investments in institutional repositories (IRs) and current research information systems (CRIS) and more funding available for paying APCs.

In a networked global environment the individual library should no longer be an island. We are putting a lot of effort into negotiating the general content (the big deals), but neglecting to make our unique collections freely available to the world. Academic libraries are struggling to fill repositories and developing CRISes. But while approving invoices from the Elseviers, Wileys etc. the libraries are afraid that article processing charges will undermine acquisition budgets and hesitate to devote adequate resources to building a common infrastructure for Green and Gold open access. Academic libraries seem way too local in their approach, and at some point it may become obvious that the libraries missed the chance to act collaboratively and proactively to pave the way for open access.

The above scenario might seem idealistic or utopian. But it contains a number of options for libraries and

libraries in collaboration to act before someone else tells libraries to act. That is: If libraries do not act proactively here, then others might come in and decide on behalf of the libraries.

### **The transition to open access incurs costs and will generate a closer look at the total cost of scholarly publishing and how libraries operate.**

There is common agreement that a transition to open access as the default will incur transition costs.

Research funders are more and more explicitly expressing readiness to invest in, for instance, paying for publication costs (APCs for open access journals and first digital copy costs for open access monographs, but they are as well looking for ways of keeping the total costs for scholarly communication down. This means that the current costs for the big deals will come into focus, not only from part of view of the libraries, but increasingly so from university managements and research funders.

The fact that research funders and governments are now looking much more into the costs of scholarly publishing is really a new phenomenon. Up until open access came on their agenda the dissemination of research results has been outsourced to the publishers in a market with no competition. The only stakeholder who cared about the costs was the libraries, who most directly felt the problem.

With the recent momentum for Gold open access we can expect a significant increase in open access content paid by article processing charges. The money flow in this business is between an open access publisher and the researcher, her institution or research grant. Only if the library can position itself in the role of handling APCs, managing publication funds the library can still have a role to play in this chain.

### **Disrupt or be disrupted!**

There is no doubt that things will change for academic libraries. We are in the midst of a development where the roles of all stakeholders are changing. Governments, research funders and universities are much more engaged in scholarly communication. Publishers are trying to adapt and find new business models. Libraries have traditionally played an important role in the promotion of open access. The paradox is that a transition to a new paradigm of scholarly communication can put libraries out of the loop.

But there is still time to act. If libraries still want to play a major role in scholarly communication it is about time to consider radical collaboration and not hide behind the complications and challenges of

licensing the subscription based content and the back office processes associated with that, thus leaving open access as a good thing, if we can afford it!

Open access is inevitable and libraries should still play an important role.

It is always better to act, than to be forced to react.